

G – Goals in the Game of Life

Dear: When I'm walking, what I almost invariably review for 'G' is just:

*G: God's a bunch of garbage. Life's a game, you win when you begin!
The rest is just picking up more winnings – carefully.*

When I'm walking, I usually don't waste time thinking about any "God garbage" – unless I've recently had some sad experience with how it's been polluting people's minds or unless (as of late) I've been digging through some of it (for this book), trying to show just what a huge pile of trash it is! That is, sometimes, it's difficult to get the contamination cleansed from my mind. Usually, but depending on what I'm planning to do in the near term, I then might spend some time thinking about how to pick up "more winnings – carefully."

Meanwhile, for this chapter, I'll continue to deviate from describing what I review when I'm walking. Thus, for now, I'll omit my assessment of "the God idea" (viz., that it's a pile of garbage); I'll get to that, later in the book. Instead, what I especially want to do in this chapter is 1) continue trying to help you make decisions (in particular, how to choose your own goals for your own game of life), and 2) *carefully* show you what I mean by *life's a game* (because I'm rather worried that you might misinterpret my meaning and, thereby, that I might negatively influence your life).

For example, if you agreed that *life's a game* and then decided to "party 'til you drop", then definitely you would have missed my meaning! Therefore, I'll expend quite a bit of effort trying to show you what I've learned about how to play this game of life. Of course I'll advocate that it's up to you to decide how to play your own game, but if I show you some of what I've learned, maybe it'll be of some value to you (where, as always, by "value" I mean "value as measured against your trio of survival goals").

Incidentally, Dear, while I was writing this chapter, I found something similar to "life's a game" in some "holy books". As is common for the Bible (as I'll show you in later chapters), the author of the following statement is unknown, but whoever wrote it, the *Wisdom of Solomon 15*, 12 states: "he [one of the makers of idols] reckons our life a game". That author, however, meant this disparagingly; I certainly don't! Similarly, in the "holy book" of Islam, called the Koran (also spelled Quran or Qur'an), Muhammad (also spelled Mohammed) reportedly stated (*The Cattle 6*, 32):

“And this world’s life is naught but a play and an idle sport, and certainly the abode of the hereafter is better for those who guard (against evil). . .” That speculation assumes, however, that a “hereafter” exists – a speculation supported by zero data.

LIFE’S A GAME!

But setting religious speculations aside until later in the book, I want to start showing you what I mean by *life’s a game* by defining words – an activity that religions avoid! According to my copy of Webster’s dictionary, ‘game’ has a great many meanings, to each of which I’ll add some comments:

- 1) **Any form of play or way of playing; amusement; recreation; sport; frolic; play.** [I’ll pursue this meaning to encourage you to enjoy your game of life – with full realization of what ‘enjoyment’ means.]
- 2a) **Any specific amusement or sport involving physical or mental competition under specific rules.** [I’ll use this meaning when I examine reasonable “rules” (both physical and mental) that you might want to follow in your own game of life, in which the prime “competition” is against premature death and against ignorance.]
- 2b) **A single contest in such a competition.** [For example, the “contest” you enter when you choose a specific goal.]
- 2c) **A subdivision of a contest.** [For example, the progress you plan to make today.]
- 3a) **The number of points required for winning.** [When I come back to this meaning, I hope you’ll see what an astounding game this game of life is: it’s the only game I know in which you win when you begin!]
- 3b) **The score at any given point in a competition.** [And for this game of life, it’s amazing that each of us keeps track of the current “score”. As I’ll try to show you, your current score in your game of life is your current feeling of happiness – which is not the goal, but the score, and which should be checked only once-and-awhile, when you have nothing better to do, e.g., when you’re unhappy!]
- 4) **That which is gained by winning; victory; win.** [And what’s “gained” when you realize that life’s a game (and that you’ve already won, by being born) is your own life – which is what you lose if you permit others (e.g., associated with any religion) to define your goals and the rules by which you play your game of life.]
- 5) **A set of equipment for a competitive amusement (to sell toys and games).** [Well, I’ll use this meaning only to point out the obvious, namely, that the “set of equipment” with which you’re provided consists of your body plus your mind – and therefore, do take care of your equipment! And maybe I should mention that the arena for the game is the entire universe of available experiences – and therefore, do try something new (but when you do, take care).]

- 6) [A way or quality of playing in competition \(to play a good game\)](#). [And if I were permitted only a brief statement of how “to play a good game”, I’d say: “Use your head as best you can; evaluate!”]
- 7) [Any test of skill, courage, or endurance \(the *game of life*\)](#). [I didn’t write that (viz., “the game of life”); the dictionary’s author did! But this game of life isn’t just an endurance test – and I’d even go easy on the “courage” (save to have the courage to make decisions, especially the decision to claim your own life, in spite of all the claims others will make on it). Yet, this game of life does take skill, especially in choosing appropriate goals and arranging them in priority.]
- 8) [A project; scheme; plan \(to see through another’s *game*\)](#). [And there is a “plan” that I hope that you’ll follow, one part of which is to “see through” the games played by those who play against you, claiming authority over your life.]
- 9a) [Wild birds or animals hunted for sport or for use as food...](#) [Well, I won’t use that meaning for ‘game’.]
- 9b) [The flesh of such creatures used as food](#). [Nor will I use that meaning.]
- 10) [Any object of pursuit or attack \(as in fair game\)](#). [Well, maybe I won’t use this meaning, except to say that I hope you’ll consider it “fair game” to resist all who attempt to force their game-plan on you.]
- 11) [\(Colloquial\) A business or vocation, especially one with an element of risk \(the *stock market game*\)](#). [And I certainly want to warn you, Dear, about “risks” in this game of life. I remind myself of these with the word *carefully*.]

So, then, what do I mean by saying “life’s a game”? First and foremost, Dear, life’s a game because, as for any game, life’s prime purpose is for enjoyment by its participants! It’s true that spectators may also enjoy some games, but this game of life isn’t a “spectator sport” (all gossip and much of what passes for “entertainment”, notwithstanding). But, Dear, please be careful with my assertion that the prime purpose of this game of life is for enjoyment by its participants: the key is to understand the concept of enjoyment; in general, enjoyments are just signals telling us that we’re being successful in our game of life.

But before exploring how to enjoy this game of life, I should mention that, I’m amazed that ‘game’ has so many meanings! And then, I’ll reveal next-to-nothing by stating what I mean by “the game of life” is essentially all that was listed above, plus more! In particular, to grasp the meaning of this “game of life”, just as for any game, you “gotta” know the goal (or goals). Then, once you know the goals (or objectives) you “gotta” know the rules! And the second and third most amazing things about this game of life are that the goals and the rules for your game of life are: whatever you decide!

Now, of course I'll come back to try to explain my meaning for this “second and third most amazing thing about this game of life” (namely, that the goals and the rules are up to you), but first, I want to show you what I find to be most amazing. To me, what's absolutely astounding about this game of life is that, you win when you begin! Everyone does! Dear: Do you know any other game in which everyone's guaranteed to be a winner before the game begins?! Let me show you what I mean.

YOU ALREADY WON!

Dear, the probability of your being here is almost inconceivably small. Let me try to show you this by making an estimate – an extremely crude estimate – a “guesstimate” – for the probability of my being here. Thus, suppose my mother had $\sim 100 = 10^2$ eggs that could be fertilized when she was with my father, suppose that (within a factor of ten or so!) any one egg had a 1 in 10 chance of being fertilized, and suppose that what I call “me” would result from 1 of a ~ 100 million $= 10^8$ spermatozoa. Then the chance of my being conceived (let alone surviving the birth process) would be about 1 in $(100 \times 10 \times 10^8) = 1$ in 10^{11} . All those other 100 billion “people” (more than 10 times the world's current population!) would have been the sisters and brothers of my sister and brothers (!) were it not for me.

But that was only for me. There's a similar small chance for the existence of each of my parents, and then their parents, and so on. Thus, suppose that something resembling humans has roamed this earth for ~ 2 million years, reproducing roughly every 20 years. (I use these two 2s just to keep the numbers simple.) Thus, suppose that there were 2×10^6 years $\div 20$ years per generation, i.e., about 10^5 generations of “humans” before me. Then, since only one specific birth must have occurred at each generation for the outcome to eventually lead exactly to me, the probability of my being here is only about 1 in $10^{11} \times 10^5 = 1$ in $10^{16} = 1$ in 10,000,000,000,000,000!

But the chance of my being here is actually much smaller than that. Thus, next an estimate is needed for the probability that, after the first appearance on Earth of a molecule capable of reproducing, its reproduction (with shifts caused by environmental and other factors) would eventually lead to an ape-like creature with a sufficiently large brain that it could be called the “first human”. As a crude “guesstimate” of this desired probability, suppose that the outcome represents about a billion ($= 10^9$) years of reproduction, with new generations occurring, say, every year (with this “reproduction time”

rather short, because some microscopic species reproduce in minutes or less, and evolution toward us humans must have started with microscopic creatures). So, if the possible number of outcomes for each generation was anywhere near comparable to that for humans, then the chance of my being here would be closer to $(1 \text{ in } 10^{16}) \times (1 \text{ in } 10^9) = 1 \text{ in } 10^{25}$.

And that still barely begins the estimate for the probability of my being here. Next, an estimate is needed for the probability that, within the original “soup” of chemicals that existed on the earth for multi-billions of years before “life” began, elements would eventually join together to form the type of reproducing molecules that have made us what we are, instead of little green creatures or whatever other kind of life that some other reproducing molecule would have led to (or leads to, on some other planet).

Now, Dear, if I worked on this problem for a while, maybe I could come up with an estimate of the probability for a reproducing molecule to occur, but even if I did invest the necessary time, clearly I would still be a long way from the desired estimate for the probability of my being here. That is, after estimating the probability of the creation of reproducing molecules (such as DNA or RNA), I’d need to estimate the probability of a planet (which we call Earth) forming from star-debris at a distance from a star (which we call the Sun) so that, once formed, the reproducing molecule would survive. [As you know, Dear, even this DNA molecule that has managed to survive has great difficulty tolerating as much ultraviolet light as we expose it to, leading to damages in its reproductive capabilities, such as mistakes in copying (which we call cancer, such as the melanoma you can get if you expose yourself to too much sunlight)].

And then, Dear, although I might also be able to estimate the probability of Earth forming around the Sun, I would then run into still-more-difficult problems. First, I’d need the probability of the existence of the star that we call the Sun (but if there are about a 100 billion = 10^{11} stars in our galaxy, which we call the Milky Way, then I guess the probability for forming the one we call the Sun is somewhere around 1 in 10^{11}). Next, I’d need the probability of the existence of this galaxy (but again, if there are a hundred billion-or-so galaxies, I guess the probability for the existence of this one is about another 1 in 10^{11}).

Then the problem gets tough (!). You probably won’t understand the rest of this sentence until after you read **Z** (and maybe not even then!), but anyway, let me just state the problem: maybe it’ll soon be possible to make a

reasonable estimate for the probability of a fluctuation in a total void to lead to a precipitate that would then cause the Big Bang, but how can one estimate the “extent” of “total nothingness” to estimate the probability for this universe to have begun? Maybe in a thousand years from now, humans will be able to estimate that probability (wow I wish I could be here to learn that answer!), but as I already wrote, I don’t have a clue how to do it.

Anyway, Dear, even not accounting for this last step (the big one!), and making wild guesses that the probability for forming a reproducing molecule was another 1 in a billion and that having the Earth located in roughly the correct location about a star was 1 in 10,000, then once this universe was formed, the (extremely crude!) probability of it all eventually leading to my existence was about $(1 \text{ in } 10^{25}) \times (1 \text{ in } 10^9) \times (1 \text{ in } 10^4) \times (1 \text{ in } 10^{11}) \times (1 \text{ in } 10^{11}) = 1 \text{ in } 10^{60}$, i.e., 1 followed by 60 zeros! And when some day an estimate becomes available for the probability of the existence of this universe (e.g., as I’ll suggest in **Z**, for the probability that a fluctuation in a total void would lead to “something” being created), then I wouldn’t be surprised if the estimate for this will be something in the ballpark of 1 in 10^{40} – where I’ve chosen the 40 to “clean up the numbers”! Then the probability for all this leading to me – and, similarly (at least close enough!), the probability of all this leading to you, Dear, would be about 1 in 10^{100} , also known as one in a googol (also spelled ‘google’).

So, Dear, do you see what I mean when I say lucky? To win, when your odds of winning are somewhere around one in a google, or even 1 in 10^{50} , or even just 1 in 10^{16} , where that one is you! – you gotta agree that – just to be alive – you gotta be one of the luckiest people who ever lived! Talk about incredible luck!! That, Dear, is what I try to remind myself by saying: *you win when you begin!*

Now, Dear, although I expect that I’m “trying your patience”, please think for a minute about the idea that *you win when you begin!* I invite you – I challenge you! – to name any other game that you win when you begin. And even if you can think of one (I can’t), then name another game not only in which you win when you begin but also, a game in which you win when your odds for winning are the incredibly small odds of something like 1 in 10^{100} ! Sorry, Dear, but if I ever get over my fantastic luck in being alive, then I deserve to die!

As you might expect, I tried to express some of the above ideas in a poem, entitled *So Lucky to be Alive*. In it (which is one of my worst – but maybe

I'll show it to you sometime), I tried to express my feelings of gratitude that, this time around, these atoms assembled to form this human. And although the "poem" (better, the "versification") is bad, yet sometimes when I'm walking, the first stanza still pops into my mind:

I used to be a blade of grass,
Anchored to the ground,
I never saw the sights that passed,
Nor heard a single sound...

But I'll leave the poem for now, to let it wither and decay into oblivion – where it belongs! (Better is Margaret Mead's summary: "[Always remember that you are absolutely unique – just like everyone else!](#)"). Instead of going any further with those ideas, I want to turn, now, to trying to explain what I mean by *the rest is just picking up more winnings – carefully*. I'll begin by going back to what I wrote above:

I'll reveal next-to-nothing by stating what I mean by "the game of life" is essentially all that was listed above [in the definitions for 'game'], plus more! In particular, Dear, to grasp the meaning of this "game of life", just as for any game, you "gotta" know the goal (or goals). Then, once you know the goals (or objectives) you "gotta" know the rules! And the second and third most amazing things about this game of life [the first most amazing thing is that, against almost incredible odds, you already won – by being born] are that the goals and the rules for your game of life are: whatever you decide!

GOALS & RULES

Dear: please think about any game you've ever played (tennis, monopoly, whatever). Before starting any game, didn't you first ask something similar to: "What's the goal?" or "What's the purpose?" or "What's the objective?" or (as we usually pronounce the words) "Whaddya sposta do?" And then, didn't you ask something similar to: "What are the rules?" or "Howrya sposta play?" It's the same for this game of life, which you already won – by being here! That is, the first things you should ask (well, at least, once you realize it's a game!) are: "What's the goal?" and "What are the rules?"

Dear, I hope you'll give some thought to answering those questions. If you don't answer them for yourself, then almost certainly, you'll lose your precious life (just as an absolutely incredible number of humans have lost theirs) to people who have the audacity to define your goals and rules for you – telling you how you're to live your own life! That's what all religions are about: telling you what the goals of your life should be (e.g., to serve

some fictitious god) and what the rules are (e.g., obey some naïve, childish “commandments”). Please, Dear, be extremely careful; don’t let anyone (including me) define you; your life belongs to you; you won the jackpot; various “moochers” will try to claim some of your prize, but your life belongs entirely to you; it’s for you to define both your goals and the rules by which you plan to play your game of life.

When you were a child, of course your parents influenced your choice of goals and defined your rules. “Do you want to watch TV tonight? Well, then, you’d better...”; “Do you want to get cavities? Well, then you’d better...”; “Do you want to get to heaven? Well, then,...” Generally, you lacked sufficient experience and knowledge to define your own goals and rules – although, even infants are very aware of their instinctive goals and are quick to inform anyone who’ll listen! But now that you’re becoming an adult, Dear, it’s time for you to take charge of your own game of life, playing by your own rules in pursuit of your own goals.

Meanwhile, many people will be “working overtime” trying to influence your choices of goals and rules – in many cases, claiming the role of referees, with authority to enforce their rules on you. For example, the sole goal of all advertisers is to influence your choice of goals – but at least they don’t attempt to force you to adopt specific rules. All societies try to influence their members’ goals (through “patriotic pledges”, songs, speeches, and a substantial portion of their “educational” programs) and try to force their members to follow specific rules (encoded in their laws), under threats of fines, prison, or worse. All organized religions attempt to force their “followers” to adopt specific goals and rules (with “commandments”, with promises of “eternal bliss in paradise”, with threats of “eternal hell fire and damnation”, with “excommunication” or some other type of “exile”, and in prior times, even with torture and execution, if the “believer” failed to follow the clerics’ rules). Yet, Dear, regardless of the manipulations, indoctrinations, threats, etc., from others, whereas it’s your life, it’s up to you to choose your own goals for your game of life and to decide upon the rules by which you’ll play. Nonetheless, when you do decide, Dear, please take care – both in choosing your goals and in setting your rules.

Dear: there’s nothing I hope for you more than that you define yourself. In your game of life – and please never forget that it’s your game – the goals and rules are for you to define (and to redefine, as your outlook on life changes with your experiences). And though, thereby, I claim no authority to define these goals and rules for you, perhaps I can help you in your own

struggle to define yourself, by showing you some aspects of my own struggle to define myself (to understand my own goals and to choose the rules for my own game). That's what this book is all about: I hope that it'll help you (as well as others), and maybe I even expect that it will help, because I think some of what I've learned is common for all sane humans.

In this chapter (and in the next two), I plan to emphasize goals. Later in this book, I'll show you the rules that I decided to adopt for my own game of life; there, I hope you'll find some ideas that are useful when you come to defining yourself; there, I trust you'll see (as a minimum) that defining reasonable rules requires just a little thought. For now, to try to eliminate any worry you might have that, later in this book, I'll be describing some weird rules for this game of life, let me try to put your mind at ease. I've found that the most important rule is: *use your brain as best you can* or stated more succinctly, *Evaluate!* From this follows subsidiary rules such as *be kind, if you can, but with keenness*, and *if it seems kind, be honest*, as well as some obvious principles such as *everyone has an equal right to claim one's own existence*, as well as *give equal value for value received*. But, Dear, it's for you to decide what rules you'll live by – although you should expect to suffer the consequences if your rules conflict with those of the society (or societies) with which you choose to be affiliated.

Let me try to say what I mean a different way. In the above, I've mostly been warning you about the “don'ts” and warning you about those who will try to define your goals and rules for you. Now, I'd like to turn to the “do's”; that is, how to define your own goals and rules. But for me, that's a “don't”! It's not my place, or anyone else's, to tell you how to define your own goals and rules. Yet, maybe I can do at least this: maybe I can show you some general principles for how to define your goals and rules, and if I show you what I've done to define mine for me, then maybe you'll see something that's useful for you. So in that spirit, let me suggest some general principles and show you both what I've learned and what others have reported.

And of course I'm aware of the possibility that your immediate reaction is: “Thanks anyway, but no thanks.” I'm well aware (even “painfully aware”) that ever since you were a baby, you've been not only immersed in ideas that your prime goal is to serve the Lord Jesus Christ but also inundated with details about how you're to live your life according to “His” desires (as interpreted by various clerics) and flooded with the notion that, you don't have just this life to live, an “eternal life” is waiting for you (after death).

Now, Dear, I know that the scheme advocated by your religion (and similar schemes are promoted by most religions) can stimulate pleasant thoughts, but surely you have had some doubts about the veracity of such schemes. Surely anyone would have some doubts about deciding to live one's life in such a manner, when there isn't the tiniest crumb of data to support such a decision. Of course, there are various "testimonies" that support such religious schemes, but there's also an enormous quantity of reliable data demonstrating that many people make mistakes and that many people lie.

It will take me many chapters to try to show you the history of mistakes and lies that led to your indoctrination with ideas about gods, immortal souls, eternal life, and so on. I'll do this in sets of chapters that I call "excursions" (e.g., the sets of chapters **Ix**, **Qx**, and **Yx**). As a single-paragraph summary of what will take me many chapters to try to show you, I'll just state that, generally, the mistakes were made by primitive people who first couldn't understand "what this world is all about" and then made the enormous mistake of accepting someone else's opinion (e.g., the tribe's medicine man, or woman, or shaman) rather than their own. Then, the lies started, when these "spokesmen for the gods" (the clerics) saw that it was a lot simpler and much more profitable to continue to con people into thinking that they (the clerics) knew "what this world is all about", rather than to work for a living. As a part of this con game, the clerics made sure that the children were indoctrinated with the idea that they (the clerics) knew "what this world is all about", and the success of this indoctrination for the past many thousands of years is illustrated by still another generation, my grandchildren, "believing" such nonsense.

And yes, Dear, I don't expect that the above paragraph (summarizing what I plan to show you in later chapters) is sufficient to persuade you to abandon what you've been taught since you were a baby. (If I did expect it to be sufficient, I wouldn't invest the huge effort of showing you details!) Therefore, what I ask you to do is the following.

First, how about placating your old grandfather by at least pretending to be interested in how he decided to live his life? After all, it was you who asked me why I didn't believe in God; I'm just responding to your question; the least you could do is pretend you're interested in my answer! And second, Dear, even if you plan to reject everything that follows, please have the patience to at least consider the ideas that follow, if only as a set of hypothetical propositions. Who knows, if someday you decide to reject your

indoctrination (for who knows what reason), then you might be pleased that you had spent some time considering alternatives.

So, Dear, assuming you're willing to continue to read this junk, I'll now push on with trying to help you find enjoyment, being pleased with how you play your game of life. If you're willing, then as I already wrote, first (as with any game) you gotta know what you're supposed to do – you gotta know the goals! In the rest of this chapter and the next two, I'll be emphasizing these goals. Also, and as I already wrote, you gotta know the rules; I'll get to those in later chapters (especially **J** through **P**). And although (as I also already wrote) both the goals and the rules are up to you, yet to learn them, you need to know yourself: as the Seven Sages of Ancient Greece advised, “**Know thyself**”, and as Socrates reportedly said, “**The unexamined life is not worth living.**”¹

From digging into trying to understand myself, I've reached the conclusion (as I've already described, multiple times!) that the prime goal of all humans is our trio of survival or “thrival” goals (of ourselves, our extended families, and our values). In turn, our sense of values generally has meaning only when measured against some objective. Unfortunately, the majority of people (viz., all people affiliated with all organized religions) have adopted the values of their religions (i.e., they measure their values against the objectives spelled out by clerics of their religions). Instead, Dear, I encourage you to choose your own objectives and then (of course) measure your values against your chosen objectives. If you do think through your objectives (and evaluate your thoughts against all available data), I expect that you'll come to the same conclusion as I have (for reasons that I'll describe in later chapters), namely, that the only reasonable and practical objective consistent with all available data is to try to solve humanity's problems more intelligently. This objective then provides a standard (in my opinion, the only reasonable standard, consistent with all available data) against which to measure essentially all values.

Now, Dear, I know that the previous paragraph was a repeat of what I wrote in early chapters, but I consider it so important that I hope you'll tolerate the

¹ Dear, the identity of “the Seven Sages” is unknown. Three likely candidates for this title are Thales (also known as the “first [Greek] philosopher”), Solon (the “first [Greek] legislator”), and Aesop (the reported author of all those wonderful fables). Some of the wisdom attributed to the Seven Sages can be found in Homer's two books, the *ILIAD* and the *ODYSSEY*; so, maybe Homer, too, is another candidate. But probably it's most appropriate to interpret “the wisdom of the Seven Sages” as “just” the wisdom that emerged out of Ancient Greece during the time period from about 650 to 550 BCE. Socrates was born about 100 years later and lived from 469 to 399 BCE; the quoted attribution to Socrates is from Plato.

repetition. It deals with our prime goals. If I now turn to what I've previously called our ten-thousand-and-one other goals in life, then I'm afraid that both the repetition and the details would become intolerable: in **E**, I began to show you something about how to “prioritize” your goals, e.g., by modifying Maslow's pyramid (his “hierarchy of needs”). Certainly I agree with Maslow that, if one of the “needs” he identifies is unsatisfied, then that need will quickly surface as a high priority goal, e.g., again, hold your breath! Yet, I found that Maslow's “hierarchy of needs” didn't help me either to identify my goals or to show me how to pursue them.

Let me put it this way. Without doubt, life is an astoundingly complicated, challenging, and potentially confusing game! Even at its simplest, this game of life has a hundred-or-so subgames being played simultaneously: something similar to (but far more extensive than) the Olympic Games – and each of us is entered in every single event, from diving to snow boarding, and from archery to wrestling! No wonder that setting goals for each event (e.g., to beat your previous record) and the rules by which you'll play (consistent with your values) can be both confusing and complicated.

PRIORITIES FOR GOALS

Some of the many reasons why setting goals and arranging them in priority is so difficult include the following.

- *The priorities for our goals keep shifting!* Thus, as soon as you satisfy (or even partially satisfy) one goal, another one pops up in its place. As a forceful example, hold your breath again!
- *The priorities for our goals differ for different time periods.* For “the long term”, your top priority goal may be... but for “the short term”, your top priority goal is...
- *We all have conflicting goals.* Although we all know that “you can't have your cake and eat it, too”, that doesn't stop us from trying!
- *Some goals seem just too big to tackle.* For example, some people might on occasion “dream about” (i.e., entertain a hope about) becoming an astronaut, a movie star, the president of this country, or similar, but upon thinking further about how to achieve such a goal (or even after taking the first few steps towards such a goal), it's abandoned, because the possibility of its fulfillment seems so remote.
- *The true goals behind our apparent goals may be hidden, even from ourselves.* For example, Dear, you may now (or may soon) be considering adopting as one of your “top priority goals” to “go on a mission” for your Church. But have you considered why you want to adopt such a goal? Do you really desire to spread “the truth” of

“another testament of the Lord Jesus Christ”, do you really want to “save lost souls”, do you really think that, thereby, you’ll be helping humanity, do you really think that this will be your ticket to heaven...? Or is your real goal to do what others want, to feel accepted by fellow Church members, to feel that you’ve “paid your dues” to belong...?

Certainly the above list could continue, but I expect that it’s not very helpful for you: you already know that it’s difficult to set “useful”, “sensible”, “reasonable”, “realistic”, “practical”, “desirable”... goals and arrange them in priority! It’s difficult even to decide what all those adjectives mean!

Yet, let me at least mention one other point. For some people – maybe even “for many people” – choosing “appropriate” goals and arranging them in priority apparently overwhelms them: a task either too difficult to tackle or, if tackled, too difficult to accomplish. Such people then give up, letting others define their goals – and their lives. When you were a child, of course your parents had a major influence both on defining your goals and on arranging circumstances that influenced their priorities. Similarly for all religions, in which clerics treat “true believers” like children: “If you want... then...” But, Dear, becoming an adult means taking responsibility for making your own decisions and living with their consequences, and therefore means taking responsibility for choosing your goals, putting them in priority, and working to make progress toward them.

Certainly, to accept someone else’s specification of one’s goals and their priorities can seem comforting. Such, however, is a childish illusion: eventually we all face the consequences of our decisions. As I mentioned before, paraphrasing Sartre, even if your only decision is to listen to the advice of a guardian angel on your shoulder (or, what is equivalent, to accept the goals and priorities dictated by others, such as the clerics of various religions), this decision has consequences that must be borne – and will be borne – by you. Therefore, Dear, let me now turn to trying to help you set your goals in priority, hoping that thereby, you’ll be pleased with how you perform, playing your own game of life.

Based on my experience, I recommend that you set yourself “various nested sets of hierarchical goals”, which will take me a while to explain. Toward this explanation, I’ll create an analogy – although I should immediately add that, in general, I don’t like analogies: many times, analogies can confuse more than clarify, in turn, because the analogy can fail to conform to details, and in turn, such failures in details can then derail the entire explanation. But even with that caveat, I’ll continue.

NESTED SETS OF HIERARCHICAL GOALS

The analogy that comes to mind for these “various nested sets of hierarchical goals” is the sets of wooden Russian “dolls” with which a certain grandchild always wanted to play when she visited. In fact, when you were two, you used one of your first words to describe them: “Outrageous!” I assume that you named the dolls “Outrageous”, because one of us must have said it was “outrageous” that, every time you visited, you always wanted to play with them. But whatever the reason, when you wanted them, you’d go to where they were stored and demand: “Outrageous”!

Anyway, Dear, I trust you know what I mean by sets of wooden Russian dolls. [Incidentally, both of our sets were given to me by a colleague and friend in Russia, whom I mentioned in Chapter C1.] They’re like painted eggshells, with one inside another, inside another, and so on, until finally, at the core, is the innermost, painted “doll”. What I want to suggest – even to recommend – is that you set yourself a nested group of goals, like paintings on those dolls, and further, set yourself not just a single group of dolls, but a whole collection of them!

To illustrate, I’ll first address a single set of nested goals. For this example, I hope that it won’t shock you too much, Dear, but someone, sometime, needs to tell you “the facts of life”: almost certainly (unless you marry someone on whom you can rely to support you “in a manner to which you have been accustomed” – and I strongly recommend against relying on such an eventuality – or unless you win a mega-jackpot or similar), then eventually you’ll need to get a job. Sorry about that, Dear, but that’s the way it is: you’ll need to look after yourself; it will be up to you to provide for your basic survival needs (food, housing, clothing, security, and so on). As unbelievable as it may seem, one day (soon!) your parents plan to push you out the front door with little beyond the clothes on your back – but of course with the good wishes: “Have a good life, Dear!”

Given the reality of this brutal treatment that your parents have been planning (even scheming) for the past umpteen years (!) and given the low probability that you’d win much in a lawsuit against them for maltreatment (and even cruelty), consider a set of nested goals or dolls, all of which are related to your “working for a living”. As you may remember, each set of Russian dolls has a general theme. Let me then assume that the general

theme of this imagined set of dolls is: “Working for a living.” I’ll assume that the outermost doll has a painting of your picking up your paycheck.

Now, consider what you’d see if you disassembled this set of dolls, slowly – although, even when a certain grandchild was two, she was always very competent at disassembling them by herself, rapidly! At the outermost shell, what might you be doing to enable you to pick up your paycheck? Of course I don’t know, nor do I particularly want to influence your choice, but let me make some general comments. First, unless you are dramatically different from the vast majority of humans (and the few exceptions are probably pathological), I strongly suspect that you’ll be pursuing your trio of survival goals, in particular, trying to help these human genes to go on. And based on my (slightly biased) assessment of your capabilities, I imagine that you’ll be making major contributions.

I’ll speculate even further. I wouldn’t be surprised if the painting on the outermost doll (of your picking up your paycheck) was in payment for your contributions toward solving one of the major problems facing humanity. Which one is another question. Maybe you approached the whole matter quite methodically. You listed what you considered to be the major problems facing humanity and then decided where you could best contribute:

- Concerned about the possibility that an asteroid would hit the Earth, destroying all humans (just as an earlier asteroid probably eliminated the dinosaurs), you decided to get your Ph.D. in aerospace engineering (similar to a certain grandfather), and the painting on the outermost doll is of you picking up your paycheck for your work on developing rockets that could intercept and destroy an incoming asteroid (or maybe you figured out a way to turn the entire asteroid belt into a new planet, or how to vaporize all asteroids to create a “dust ring”, or...). Amazing!
- Concerned about overpopulation, you decided to get your M.D. in medical research, and you were being paid for your work on simpler and more effective birth-control methods. Imagine! It was my grandchild who finally found a way to reduce the world’s population by a factor of 10 without war, without strife, with everyone willingly cooperating, with... Wonderful!
- Concerned about consequences of various forms of pollution, you decided to get your Ph.D. in some branch of environmental sciences and you were being paid for your work on creating new supplies of fresh water.
- Concerned about diminishing energy supplies, realizing that modern society would collapse without a steady supply, you decided to get your Ph.D. in physics and you were being paid for your work in developing fusion power.

Or, concerned about AIDS and similar viruses, the damage to biodiversity, climate change, crime, war, weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, ignorance throughout the world, the hideousness of all religions... you decided on a course of action by which you expected you could help, and there you are on the painting, picking up your paycheck. Impressive, Dear! Congratulations!

Next, let's move on to the painting on the next doll, inside. Whatever you were getting paid for (with the picture of your picking up a paycheck on the outer doll), the next inner doll has a picture of your picking up another college diploma. Surely that's you, although it's not at all clear what field of specialty you chose. For now, don't worry about such details: they'll become clear as you proceed. And if the picture is of your getting a degree in engineering physics (similar to a certain grandmother), but you later decide to be a politician, don't worry about it: the world needs more politicians with degrees in engineering physics!

The next inner doll has a picture of your heading off to college, with glowing grades from high school. Don't worry about your undergraduate college, Dear; any public university will be pretty much as good as another – provided that you work hard! And so on it goes, doll after doll, until the “innermost doll” shows a certain grandchild pushing this chapter aside, to get back to something more significant: studying to get a better grade on a forthcoming exam!

And thus, Dear, I hope you see what I mean by a nested set of goals – even though all the above has been for only one set of goals, dealing with your employment. And if the pictures on some of the dolls are now obscure, don't worry about it: the details will become clearer as you proceed. I'm sure that you want to help humanity, and I'm equally sure that you will. For now, what you can do is just “dance as best you can” – get the best grade that you can on your next exam.

Meanwhile, though, there are many other sets of nested goals that you should be simultaneously pursuing; other set of dolls to assemble – making sure that you don't inadvertently mix dolls from different sets! For example, there's a set of dolls associated with maintaining your health: if you don't look after your health, you'll damage the likelihood that you'll accomplish your other goals. The picture on the outer doll might be of your still going for hikes when you're 70; the innermost doll (showing your current

condition) has pictures of your eating healthful foods, getting sufficient rest, and exercising regularly.

Another set of goals, another set of dolls, might be related to your “civic consciousness”. You belong to a wonderful society that provides you with enormous opportunities (and an enormous variety of opportunities). You won’t be required to plant rice, you’re not destined for the coal mines, you’re not likely to be killed in the next revolution or war... So, recognizing how much you benefit from your society, you accepted the idea: “[The only way to repay our debt to the past is to put the future in debt to yourself.](#)”

Therefore, perhaps the outer doll in this “civic group” has a picture of you, when you are in your sixties, serving in Congress. And you bet that there’s a huge group of dolls hidden beneath that outer doll: starting at the core when you served on your school’s student council, then in college as student representative on the university’s administration, then as a member of your city council, next as a county commissioner, and so on. On the other hand, maybe this set of “civic dolls” is quite different: the outer picture has you delivering lectures on TV about... and the whole set of dolls details how you arrived at this point. Or you’re the National Chairperson of... and in this case, the inner doll shows your giving your next talk to your class. And so on it goes, Dear, but maybe that’s enough rambling for now – save to mention two topics that really bother me.

I’ve gotta go easy on the first one, because as your grandmother says, when I get going on it, I “go ballistic”. Here, I’ll try to just tiptoe up to it – and then sneak off! It deals with the stupidity, currently in vogue, suggesting that school children should be required (viz., forced) to gain some “practical experience” in “civic consciousness”. A group of stupid ^#@\$%^!% “social planners” want to force children to take time off from school to serve soup to the hungry, pass out clothing to the poor, and so on. How could anyone be so dumb?! And now they’re talking about a “draft” to require youngsters to serve at least a year, to “discharge” their civic responsibilities? “Beam me up, Scotty; there’s no intelligent life down here.”

Or at least, say it isn’t so. Tell me that there’s still some intelligence in this world. Show me the data that demonstrate that these people being interviewed on TV have IQ’s greater than 10. How could people get all dressed up in fancy clothes, drive to a TV station, sit in front of a camera, and advocate such nonsense – when such people doesn’t know even how to make thread, let alone clothes, let alone know how a car or TV station

works, and let alone improve the efficiency of a car's engine or the efficacy of a TV camera or use the equations of electrodynamics and quantum mechanics to improve communications and communication devices. My point (before I go into orbit): Dear, by learning all that you can at school, you will be doing your utmost for humanity; leave to the incompetent "social planners" those tasks that challenge their competencies, such as serving soup – although I wouldn't be surprised if even that task would exceed their capabilities.

And then there's the idiocy of all organized religions. If it doesn't also send me into orbit, it can cause me to almost crash and burn in depression: the poor children of the world, my poor grandchildren. I saw a picture on TV of a classroom full of little kids, sitting but rocking back and forth, memorizing the Koran, which is the sum-total of their "learning". Damn the clerics of the world! And then there's a certain grandchild, proudly displaying to me the necklace she had earned for having memorized the "articles of faith" of her religion. Damn all the clerics of the world to the hell they invented! With the help of indoctrinated parents, the clerics indoctrinate children to adopt a set of nested goals whose prime purpose is to keep the clerics in power, fat and happy, polluting humanity with their ignorance.

SOME GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR SETTING GOALS

But I'd better back off from those thoughts for now. I'll return to them (again and again!) later in this book. Instead, Dear, maybe you can see why I don't want even to try to define your goals and their priorities. I would consider it to be as dumb as some of the "social planners" and as evil as the clerics to try to force some goals and their priorities on you. It's your life. No one but you knows all your goals and all the circumstances that dictate your priorities. Only you have been living all the details of your life, only you know your feelings about so-and-so, only you know how much it hurts when... only you know how happy you were when... only you know... only you! Therefore, only you can identify your goals and put them in priority. Yet, my goal (to try to help you) needn't be entirely hopeless, because I think that all humans have the same prime goals (their trio of survival goals) and because I think that there are some general principles for setting goals in priority that are applicable for everyone.

Let me now comment on some of these "general principles", with separate comments dealing with instinctive, emotional, and rational goals.

First, most of our instinctive (or Body) goals needn't be put in priority; they pretty much take care of that, by themselves: breathing, maintaining body temperature, getting water and food, eliminating wastes, sleeping, exercising, and so on, generally in that priority. Yet, Dear, once again, please be careful. Please think about your Body's goals and their priorities. Please make sure that you assign "regular sleep", "regular exercise", and "good foods" high priorities – and drink lots of water. And again, please never – Never – NEVER pollute your body with addictive drugs such as nicotine, marijuana, cocaine, and similar.

And still more care is needed, putting your Body's goals in priority and pursuing them. Thus, I'm sure you'll be more pleased (with your performance in your game of life) if you use your Left Brain's "pilot" to ensure that Body's "autopilot" stays on course. If you eat too much, you'll be displeased when you're overweight – if for no other reason than the damage to your health. If you don't exercise regularly, then not only will pains develop but also you'll be unable to think so clearly as you otherwise could. If you allow other instincts to get out of control (e.g., to have unprotected sex with a stranger), then you can damage your health horribly and irreversibly. So, Dear, generally let your autopilot guide you (if it says "duck" or "slam on the brakes", then do it!), but when "the going gets tough" – when the decisions get tougher – and you have time to think, then have your Left Brain take control.

And let me slip in, here, my hope that you'll never permit someone else to meddle in setting priorities for your Body's goals – save perhaps an M.D. you trust. For example, some religions "require" of wives that one of their highest priority goals for their bodies is to "yield" to their husbands and to have children! What astounding audacity – perpetrated by men! Dear: if anyone – but anyone – even hints that your body belongs to anyone but you (as some males may, many religions will, and even society might, with laws banning abortion), then tell them to blow it out their ears! Similarly, for the "sin" of homosexuality some idiotic religions threaten extreme, eternal punishment in a totally fictitious "Hell". If you feel you need to rely on some "authority", Dear, please feel free to relate that your grandfather advised you to tell anyone who meddles in setting priorities for your sex life to mind their own god-damn business (or their own damnable-god business, as the case may be).

But enough, for now, about priorities for Body's goals; next, consider Right-Brain (or emotional) goals. Many (if not most) of our emotional goals,

similarly, don't need Left Brain's "meddling" to define priorities; they also do quite a good job by themselves. In general, if it feels good, if it gives you pleasure, then "go for it", and similarly, if it causes you pain generally try to avoid it: seek warmth from the fire, but try to avoid getting burned! Yet, in many cases, Left Brain (reason) should again step-in, this time to constrain your emotions. For example, Dear, I know you'd really enjoy that candy, but... and I know you'd rather go skiing than study, but... and sure it's fun to... but...! Sometimes, Left Brain can be a real drag, can't it?

In turn, the source of some of this conflict seems to be that different time scales are involved. Our instincts usually deal with immediate goals (e.g., "duck!"). Our emotions usually deal with short-term goals ("Yah; I'm gonna skip studying and..."). Meanwhile, our reasoning is capable of "seeing" the future in more detail and evaluating ramifications of our choices. When it's appropriate, Dear, I urge you to use your reasoning capabilities to the best of your ability, i.e., evaluate!

And thus, Dear, I return to the tough one: putting our rational (Left Brain) goals in priority. And again I feel the need to caution you, again harping on the word "carefully"! As another analogy, I've found that the best way to pick up additional winnings in this game of life (setting goals in priority) is a lot like walking in the desert in the snow: you must lift each foot high (to avoid hitting unseen obstacles when stepping forward) and then plant each foot firmly (to avoid slipping when taking your next step). Stated differently, look ahead: try to foresee consequences of your decisions – and take care!

But while looking ahead, don't overlook some wisdom from the past. For example, there's more wisdom from the Seven Sages of Ancient Greece: "Nothing too much", which the Roman philosopher Terence (~190–159 BCE) modified to "Moderation in all things." From this wisdom follows a long list of other "Do's and Don'ts", including the following.

- In your game of life, challenge yourself, but don't overwhelm yourself. The competition that you choose in your game of life (i.e., your goals) should be neither a joke nor an impossibility.
- Whereas life's a game, don't take it (or yourself) too seriously! Some people who have taken life too seriously have then committed suicide. Play well, play to the best of your ability against appropriate competition, but don't forget that you are just playing! Dance as best you can.

- Don't let a particular goal become oppressive! Don't let enjoyment of progressing toward a particular goal overwhelm other enjoyments in life! Life's a game with a huge number of simultaneous events – like the Olympic Games – and you've entered all events!
- Don't get hung up on your long-term goals: no one can see the future clearly. For example, Dear, somewhere in mid-life, I gave up trying to see beyond about five years into the future: circumstances changed so dramatically and unexpectedly during the intervening years that it was a waste of time, energy, and emotion trying to plan further than about five years.
- For each time period, decide on the priority of your Left Brain goals, striking a “happy balance” between security and insecurity, stimulation and tranquility, company and solitude, work and play, the achievable and the fanciful, drudgery and dreaming... taking special care to constrain wants with realistic expectations and to live according to your own sense of honor.
- Life is only figuratively to be lived (as Somerset Maugham wrote) “on the razor's edge” (between security and insecurity); otherwise, you'll end up with horribly hurting feet!

Now, Dear, I certainly wouldn't be surprised if you found the above “general principles” to be so “general” that they're essentially worthless. In the next two chapters, **H1** and **H2**, I'll try to become more specific, trying to show you ways to put, especially, your long-term goals into priority (i.e., how to adopt reasonable “hopes”) and trying to show you how to “optimize” your satisfaction with the progress you're making toward your goals (also known as “happiness”). Here, to end this chapter, let me encourage you to explore (in books and on the internet) what others have advised about setting goals – and encourage you to be cautious about accepting anyone else's specification either of your goals or even the methods you choose for setting your goals.

Dear, if you see that *life's a game, you win when you begin* – and if you do have the strength to define your own goals and rules for your own game – then *the rest is just picking up more winnings!* As with any good game, most of what you win (most fun) is not in the outcome but in playing the game. This is especially the case for this weird game of life, in which you win when you're born and the outcome is certain, namely, your death – which, however, isn't losing: it's when the game is over, when you're so tired after having so much fun, that you want to call it quits!

But, Dear, please pick up your winnings, carefully. Not only must you be careful to avoid a premature end to your game (your death) and not only

must you be careful how you wrestle with a substantial amount of stupidity (perpetrated by other players and which you will be unable to avoid), you must be careful not to forfeit your game to those who have the audacity to claim “authority” to define you. To claim your game, Dear:

- *Set your own goals – and give them your best shot,*
- *Choose your own competition – that will challenge,*
- *Play well – using your own strategy,*
- *Play by your own rules – guided by your own evaluations, and*
- *Play fair – based on your own set of values.*

In addition, as I’ll try to show you in **H1**, it’s wise to be careful not to choose “pursuit of happiness” as a goal, and as I’ll try to show you in **H2**, it’s especially important to be careful in choosing priorities for your long-term goals (viz., your hopes). When I’ve finished showing you details about those ideas, plus covered ideas about choosing and evaluating your values, then maybe you’ll see most of what I mean by the word “carefully” in:

Life’s a game you win when you begin! The rest is just picking up more winnings – carefully.

For now, Dear (and for always!), I hope you’ll take particular care defining yourself: set your own goals and rules. Then the game and future winnings will be yours. For this game of life, you’re free to make up your own rules, although unfortunately, some rules you might choose can be subject to constraints forced by the society into which you’re born. But even in the worst dictatorial societies, probably still you could set many of your own rules, especially such important rules as: Before you speak, touch your tongue to your cheek! Before you walk, curl the toes of your feet! Before you get up each morning, smile! It’s a game; you won; you’re alive!